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THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE 43RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE HELD AT CONWAY HALL, RED LION SQUARE, LONDON W.C.1 ON FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY APRIL 4TH, 5TH AND 6TH 1947.

The General Secretary called the Conference to order at 11.15 a.m.

<u>Chairman</u>	-	A. Turner
<u>Vice-Chairman</u>	-	A. Snellgrove
<u>Tellers</u>	-	R. Ambridge, W. Graske, R. McDowall, G. Sword.

REPORT OF THE 43RD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

BRANCHES AND MEMBERSHIP

In answer to a question the General Secretary said that the reasons for which 102 members had left the party were as follows: Lapsed 69, resigned 17, died 8, expelled 1, gone abroad 2, and written off books owing to dissolution of Hamilton branch 5.

Item for discussion (xvi) - Manchester. "The attitude to the enrolment of young persons still under religious influence"

Manchester said that they had had applicants for membership who, while mainly accepting the party's views, still had some hazy religious ideas. Too much was attached to the religious question by the party. We gave entrance to applicants who were immature on other subjects and were rigid on the religious question only. Could not some form of probationary membership be set up? Hackney said that the religious idea was the hardest one to eradicate, and when members came into the party with remnants of these ideas, contacts with other members would get rid of them. Edgware considered that the question of religion was over emphasised with applicants. Birmingham had encouraged applicants with religious ideas to keep in touch with the party and help with the work. The religious question should not be continually pressed with these people, but they should be given a sound basis of knowledge. Paddington said that as the basis of the party's position was that of materialism members who came into the party with religious ideas would soon leave. S.W. London opposed any relaxation of the party's attitude to applicants. This they said would be the thin edge of the wedge towards a position in which we should be concentrating on counting heads instead of concerning ourselves with the quality of the membership. A member of the Editorial Committee said that the pamphlet "Socialism and Religion" was at present being revised.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Resolution - Walters and Garside (Paddington) - "That the whole question of electoral activity be discussed first business after lunch, Resolution G being taken first" Agd.

(c) Report of Central Organiser.

Dartford said that there was plenty of enthusiasm among members. What we lacked was a medium through which to express it. Head Office organisation was not adequate and there was insufficient contact between the Central Organiser and branches. There should be proper organisers' meetings with good branch representation. Branches not represented at these meetings should be sent full reports of the meetings. Evidence of the enthusiasm of members was given by the number who attended propaganda meetings and wrote for the party. The Central Organiser said that Dartford had grounds for complaint but it was not her fault. There was plenty of enthusiasm in the branch, but it had had very bad experiences

through speakers failing to attend their propaganda meetings. A number of branch organisers' meetings had been called in 1948 and reports of the meetings had been sent to branches. At the last two meetings the attendance had been very poor. Head Office could only give more support to branches when there were more speakers available. A big proportion of the party membership was inactive in organised party work, and most of the work had to be done by a few.

PROPAGANDA

(b) Full-time propagandist/organiser.

In reply to a question the General Secretary said that Manchester branch had informed the Executive Committee that the services of propagandist/organisers were better used in London during the winter months. Glasgow concurred with this statement. A Marylebone delegate asked that organisers should not concentrate entirely on propaganda meetings. We should get among workers in places where they congregate during breaks in working hours etc. Newport thought that we had enough propagandists, we needed organisers. The task of organisation was not just that of holding meetings in the areas of provincial branches. The organiser should concentrate on the district served by the branch, organising groups and generally making the party known. This sort of work had not been carried out by our organisers. Manchester said that the idea of groups was a good one, but it was not so simple as it sounded. There were not numbers of workers waiting to be organised and we cannot expect an organiser to start from scratch and build something quickly. The organiser must work in close conjunction with the branch. There were probably individuals in contact with branches who were sympathetic and members who rarely engaged in branch activity at all. These people should be contacted by the organisers and stimulated to take party work. The work of an organiser would be largely limited by the branch he worked with. Manchester said that Fenwick had done well in their area.

(c) Propaganda statistics.

Resolution - R. McLaughlin and N. Taylor (S.W. London) "That the E.C. be asked to consider ways and means of increasing literature sales at propaganda meetings" Agd.

Resolution (C) - Birmingham branch "That the 'New Speakers Test' be abolished as branches are able to judge the capabilities of the speaker"

Birmingham said that the New Speakers Test had been justified during the war, but branches worthy of the name were surely able to say whether a member should be permitted to speak on the outdoor platform unaccompanied by an experienced speaker. Newport said that some members who were capable outdoor speakers were very nervous of appearing before an examining committee. Leyton pointed out the difficulties in small branches of ensuring the presence of an experienced speaker to accompany one who had not passed the test. There should also be some means of applying the test in the provinces to save members travelling to London. Islington thought that if members wanted to appear on the platform they would have the initial interest to appear before a committee. Edgware said that we were not always dealing with branches containing experienced members, but sometimes with branches composed of new members. These branches would not have the competence necessary to judge the capacity of a prospective speaker. A member of the New Speakers Examining Committee said that the test had great value. The committee had been surprised by the low level of knowledge of a high number of the members who

had appeared before it. More than half had been deficient in a knowledge of elementary economics. The committee had spent a lot of time with the applicants and they had been dealt with patiently. A delegate who had been through the test said that the committee had been very helpful.

The resolution was lost 17-53.

EDUCATION

Resolution - Billing and Craven (Paddington) - "That in view of the report on the question of new writers this conference recommends that every endeavour be made to form a writers class" Agd.

Item for discussion (xiii) - S.W. London branch. "The systematic training of members in socialist principles"

This committee, said S.W. London, should be formed of members who have knowledge of the party's educational work. The brightest part of the whole conference report was the statement that 55 members had attended the economics class. When the training of these members had been completed they should be used as tutors in branches. Edgware objected to the rigidity visualised by "systematic". An E.C. member said that the problem of education was the most important issue facing the party, and the acquisition of knowledge depended on putting things in their right order. As soon as members joined the party they should be allocated to a class where they would learn about the organisation of the party and its methods of working. Education should not be left to chance. A West Ham delegate said that the cause of the lack of knowledge among party members was the six years of war which had made study very difficult. Given time to recover this problem would be overcome. Manchester asked if we could get the necessary number of people able to take on the job of tutors. Until this could be done it would be a waste of time discussing the improvement of knowledge among members. A Marylebone delegate said that the idea would fail because there was no way in which members could be brought to the classes.

Resolution - R. McLaughlin and N. Taylor (S.W. London) "That this conference urges the E.C. to set up a special committee for the purpose of analysing and reporting to the E.C. on the possibilities of improving and increasing the present machinery in existence for the education of party members"

Deferring resolution - Lawrence and Michell (Bloomsbury) "That consideration of the resolution be deferred until later in the conference" Agd.

ELECTORAL ACTIVITY

Resolution (G) - S.W. London branch "That this conference instructs the E.C. to defer the running of Parliamentary candidates until such time as the matter has been again reviewed by the membership as a whole and fresh instructions given to the E.C."

S.W. London said that they had already circularised the membership with a statement in support of this resolution, and this statement should be taken as their opening on the resolution. The statement said that the time, energy and funds spent was out of all proportion to the results secured. Our purpose must be to build an organisation of class conscious workers possessing a thorough knowledge of socialist principles. Our main task was of an educational nature. We must get our message to those widely dispersed over the country who have reached a mental level enabling them to appreciate our case. The general election when political interest was high provided an opportunity of contacting this minority, but instead we concentrated in North Paddington, where we spent hundreds of pounds on literature which was distributed to politically backward workers. Members were drawn

to Paddington from all parts of London and supplies of literature to branches and parties abroad were reduced. In addition £150 of working-class money was handed over to the capitalist class. The bye-election followed the same course and another £150 was donated to the capitalists. In all the two campaigns cost over £1500 and there was practically nothing to show for it. Hardly any publicity had resulted. As a whole the venture must be condemned as a serious error of judgement and a serious failure. Let us face the facts and recognise that the working class is not ready for a socialist candidate. S.W. London suggested as an alternative that propaganda drives should be organised at suitable bye-elections. They added that a more disturbing feature had been the failure to give sufficient emphasis to our declaration "That the emancipation of the working class must be the work of the working class itself". There had been a failure to state our case completely and correctly and an attempt to build up the support of politically inactive people by the promise of socialism. They quoted with approval statements made in an early Socialist Standard and by the Socialist Party of Canada in an election address, contrasting them with an excerpt from our election literature at North Paddington which they disapproved of. Paddington said that S.W. London implied that the party had engaged in "vote catching" in the two campaigns. This charge was unfounded both in relation to the spoken and written propaganda. The general conditions of election campaigns made it very favourable for the presentation of the party's case. If we must not undertake election campaigns because of the immaturity of the workers it would be equally logical to conduct no propaganda at all. In the "Communist Manifesto" Marx and Engels had gone on to the attack and not the defence, and this was over 100 years ago. In putting up candidates for socialism the party changed its position from a negative one to a positive one, and as a result of this action there would be an acceleration in the education of the working class. We must not devote our entire propaganda to those who knew our case but must get to those who had not heard us. An E.C. member attacked the circular on the grounds that it put a point of view different from that expressed by the resolution. S.W. London were in opposition to electoral action and expressed this in the circular, but their resolution only asked for the question to be reviewed. Consequently some branches would support the resolution who might not be opposed to electoral action. The campaigns had produced excellent publicity with numerous mentions in the national press, many of which indicated that the party was different from and in opposition to other parties. The charge of "vote-catching" was completely unfounded and unfair to the members taking part. Criticism had been received on completely different grounds that members had spent much time in asking workers not to vote for us unless they understood our position. Most of the money spent had been donated especially for the purpose, and S.W. London were wrong in implying that this money would have been available for use in other directions. Again the members who worked in the campaigns would not necessarily have as much time and energy for other work. The value of the radio publicity for the party was also stressed. Lewisham said that if S.W. London's view was that we must wait for the workers to come to us then it must be a waste of time to be in the party at all. We cannot get the case for socialism over without spending money and we should probably be spending a few £150's for a few years to come but that is the way we shall get our propaganda across. Islington said that the first question we should be asked when holding meetings at elections where we have no candidates would be "who is your candidate?" Having a candidate provided the positive approach to workers at elections. An Ealing delegate said that as we are the only party representing the interests of the working class it is our duty to put ourselves forward at election times. Were there a bye-election immediately we should get the money and help to run a candidate. Another Paddington delegate said that the campaigns had stimulated the branch members to greater activity.

A further Paddington delegate said that the resolution was unnecessary. Electoral activity was continually under review, and one of the purposes for which the party existed was to run candidates at elections. Party members liked election campaigns and this itself was a good thing. We must not divide the working class into political sheep and goats, and we must not become an economic desert island to which the workers have to struggle. It was our duty to come out against the parties of capitalism both at general and bye-elections. West Ham branch supported the resolution, but not because they agreed with the S.W. London circular. The time had come to review the situation. Electoral action was a good thing if entered into judiciously but the whole thing must be examined carefully. Birmingham said that they were in favour of the resolution but dissociated themselves from the S.W. London circular, with its criticism of past activity. A Marylebone delegate, putting his own point of view, said that it was ridiculous to ask the workers to vote for socialism if they understood it. If they could not understand socialism at our ordinary propaganda meetings, they would not do so at election times, when our propaganda became mixed up with the other political parties. A socialist candidate must arise from the electorate and not be imposed on it. Hackney supported S.W. London's resolution. The delegate said that the experience of the campaigns had proved them to be a waste of time. There had been very little notice taken of us in the press, and Paddington branch had not grown very much. We can still put a positive case at elections even if we do not put a candidate forward. The posters used in poster parades had been worded in a way that indicated "vote-catching". If £1500 had been spent in another way members could have found plenty to do in propaganda drives etc. The results of the elections had been disheartening. An E.G. member said that although money had been subscribed for a special purpose, the people who sent it did not have bottomless purses and we had the responsibility of spending the money in the best way. It would have been absurd for S.W. London branch to have framed their resolution in a way setting a time for the suspension of electoral activity, as no one knew what the position would be in two to three years time. Some members of the working class were hopeless from our point of view, and these were the people who the ruling class permitted us to send literature to without a postage charge. Workers likely to be interested in socialism would come to us for literature without it being necessary to send it to them. Our work lies in the future and we had a long road to travel, and it was a waste of time working among the politically backward workers. We should direct our attention to live material, and these people would come to our propaganda meetings.

Addendum to Resolution (G) - Hackney branch "Add 'and that the reviewing of the matter take place within three months'"

Addendum lost 29-44.

Resolution (G) lost 54-59.

Resolution - Howard and Michell (Bloomsbury) "That this conference rejects the conclusions with regard to electoral activity contained in the S.W. London branch's statement on parliamentary action Cd. 48-5.

Resolution - Michell and Howard (Bloomsbury) "That this conference deploras the introduction into the S.W. London circular of some phrases that are dangerous, other statements that are not correct, and others again that are misleading. For instance, the allegations that the campaign was a campaign for votes and that the literature published did not contain an adequate statement of the socialist case. Both allegations are wrong as the literature itself proves. We also deplore the manner in which reference is made to the working class of Paddington"

Bloomsbury said that the circular would be dangerous in the hands of our opponents. We had never said that large numbers of workers could not understand our case. Statements which had been torn from their context gave a very unfair picture of the attitude taken up by us at Paddington. Another Bloomsbury delegate said that deprecatory statements about the working class in the circular would cost us a lot of time in explanations. An E.C. member quoted as particularly harmful the statement that £150 of working class money had been handed over to the capitalist class with the promise of more to come. A S.W. London member said that nothing had been torn from its context in the memorandum, and the circular was a fair one.

The resolution was Cd. 48-3.

- (a) General. A member of the Parliamentary Committee said that all branches had been asked for information necessary to the preparation of machinery for the next General Election and possible bye-elections. Branches had been slow in replying and delegates were urged to have the work hurried up in their branches. Funds were also badly needed. Only £17 had come into the Parliamentary Fund since the beginning of the year.

Resolution (F) - Camberwell branch "That a standing panel of prospective parliamentary candidates be drawn up immediately on the basis of nomination by the whole party and selection by party poll. Further that the selection committee, elected directly by the party membership control the allocation of the selected candidates to constituencies"

Camberwell said that they felt that arrangements in previous campaigns had been very rushed, and that proper machinery should be put in operation. Marylebone opposed the resolution because it tried to take away the essential functions of the Executive Committee. The E.C., (and Birmingham concurred here), were the best people to consider the relevant points and place candidates where best suited. This was unnecessary over organisation at the present stage said Lewisham, and only one or two candidates would be concerned for some time to come. When there are more candidates the machinery necessary can be arranged. Hackney supported the resolution as they thought the method suggested to be more democratic.

The resolution was Lost 12-50.

Item for discussion (i) - Leyton branch "To discuss Rule 28 with a view to allowing known sympathisers to sign nomination papers"

This alteration of rule Leyton said would enable the party to contest constituencies where we had not ten members, but there were known sympathisers. We took money from sympathisers - why not permit them to sign. S.W. London wanted to know who was a known sympathiser and how he could be determined. The whole thing was a myth. If a member of the working class recognised his class position he should be in the party. A suggestion like this would lead us into the field of compromise and political trading. A member of the parliamentary committee refuted a rumour circulated at the conference table that non-members had signed the nomination papers at Paddington. The idea of discussing a rule with a view to amendment at a subsequent conference was favourably commented upon.

Item for discussion (ii) - Leyton branch "The widening of the field of activity regarding municipal elections as these provide a good propaganda field"

Item for discussion (iii) - Paddington branch "Should the party concentrate on parliamentary rather than on municipal elections?"

A Marylebone delegate, putting his personal point of view, said that with the present smallness of the party and scarcity of funds we should devote ourselves to parliamentary action. Paddington said that municipal elections did not give us favourable opportunities

for putting our policy as the items discussed were of a local and domestic character. Birmingham said that a candidate in a municipal election would do harm to the party. He would be merely a dummy.

Item for discussion (iv) - S.W. London branch - "The organisation of propaganda local and national at bye-elections"

S.W. London said that the attitude of the branch was based on our Declaration of Principles which pledged us to capture the machinery of government, both local and national. We should utilise elections for propaganda without incurring the enormous expense of running candidates.

AMENDMENTS TO RULE

Camberwell branch - new rule. "That members attached to a branch holding regular business meetings be required to attend at least one in every four of these meetings; that members failing to comply with this ruling be required to give an explanation to their branch for their non-appearance and branches be empowered where they think fit to transfer such members to Central branch" Lost 2-69.

Palmers Green amendment - "Delete all after 'fit' and insert 'to lapse such members'" Lost 0-71.

Hackney branch Rule 2. "That '3d.' on line one be deleted and '6d.' inserted" Lost 8-65.

Leyton branch Rule 8 Line 4. "That 'after the expiration of each quarter' be deleted and 'after the expiration of each half-year' be substituted" Lost 4-62.

West Ham branch Rule 19 - new paragraph to be added. The new paragraph to read 'All paid officers shall be elected by party vote'" Lost 20-48.

S.W. London branch Rule 25 "That 'a meeting' be deleted and 'District meetings' be inserted" Lost 25-42.

(6) EDUCATION (Cont.)

Resolution deferred from previous day - R. McLaughlin and N. Taylor
"That this conference urges the E.C. to set up a special committee for the purpose of analysing and reporting to the E.C. on the possibilities of improving and increasing the present machinery in existence for the education of party members"

When the discussion was resumed Marylebone said that we must first arrive at a decision on the principle of systematic training. It had been argued that it was necessary for young members to receive from the beginning of their membership this sort of training. If we accepted this principle we should then proceed to take the necessary steps in furtherance of it. S.W. London said that the E.C. should see how the present educational machinery of the party could be improved and extended. A Leyton delegate said that members who understood ~~xxx~~ economics should be able to take the financial reports of large capitalist organisations and understand them in the light of Marxian economics. We must apply our knowledge to present day events and not only to things that happened many years ago. Marylebone, speaking again, said that the resolution did not go far enough. Every member who joined the party should be compelled to join in a systematic form of training. Another Marylebone delegate said that his branch had given no instructions on this item and the delegates were expressing their personal points of view. Why should the working class concern itself with abstruse financial matters? The basis of our present education

was adequate, but we should deal with the question of dialectical materialism in our education. Birmingham was opposed to any form of compulsion being used with new members. Manchester thought that the discussion had veered away from the resolution. No one could object to the setting up of further machinery for educational purposes. Hackney thought that a further committee would not solve the problem. It depended on members how they used the knowledge acquired at H.O. classes. We have members with a knowledge of Marxian economics who did not know how to apply the knowledge in the work of the party. The best thing is for members to work in the party and this will encourage them in their educational efforts. S.W. London wound up the discussion by saying that if members had ideas for improving the educational work of the party they should send them along to the committee to help them in their analysis. Members could get a certain amount of education by working in the party, but our prime function was propaganda.

The resolution was Cd. 33-4.

- (b) 1946 Delegate meeting recommendation on party syllabuses. The General Secretary informed the Conference that a series of syllabuses were now in hand and being prepared for printing.

Item for discussion (vi) - Manchester branch. "The possibilities of printing a pamphlet or guide book for the use of branches and groups to facilitate the running of economics and speakers classes"

In view of the General Secretary's statement about syllabuses this item was not pressed.

ITEM FOR DISCUSSION

Item for discussion (xvii) - Edgware branch. "The advisability of appointing a committee to investigate conference procedure, including the appointment of conference chairman"

Edgware said that owing to increased delegations at conference the procedure tended to become disorganised. Chairmen should be elected before the conference and co-operate with the Standing Orders Committee before the conference and map out the agenda. Perhaps chairmen could be appointed by the E.C. or elected by party poll. The General Secretary opposed Edgware's suggestions. Conferences continued to run smoothly, and we must resist any procedure which would put too much power in the hands of chairmen or standing orders committees. The party conference must be in the hands of the delegates, and they must be responsible for their smooth running. A Billonsbury delegate put forward the idea of conference chairmen being elected a year before at the previous conference.

LITERATURE

- (b) Party publications (Editorial). There was a short discussion on the level of articles in the "S.S.", and methods by which the writing ability of members might be improved.

Item for discussion (v) - Islington branch. "The desirability of a fortnightly 'S.S.' rather than the present monthly issue"

The party had many years ago hoped for a weekly issue. The present make-up of the "S.S." should be changed to newspaper size. This, said Islington, would enable the use of better headlines and a better lay-out generally. The Islington delegate was not in favour of a more frequent issue of the "S.S." while it remained as it is now. Present paper shortages should not stop us discussing plans for the future. Birmingham opposed a fortnightly issue with the present scarcity of writers. We should aim first at a weekly paper. Leyton said that the present "S.S." would be increased in size. A fortnightly "S.S." should contain items of news regarding party events. Writers unable to tackle theoretical

articles could handle this sort of work. Southend thought it was not possible to do anything about it owing to paper restrictions. Hackney said that Islington appeared to be entirely dissatisfied with the S.S. How did they think we could make a success of a fortnightly if we cannot make a success of a monthly? A member of the Editorial Committee said that the paper we can use is strictly limited by the quota imposed, and the limited amount had been even more reduced owing to the recent fuel crisis. Paper shortage ruled out a fortnightly S.S. for a considerable time to come. Greater numbers of writers were now coming forward, and in addition other members were trying to write articles and probably had the possibilities of developing into writers. In course of time we ought to have a body of competent writers for the S.S. Some members who had undertaken to do work for the Editorial Committee had had to hold up writing owing to taking up other party work. Members should exercise their judgement in deciding what sort of work they would do. It is not possible at a writers class to give members the mental background necessary for party writing. Writers must first of all have sound theoretical knowledge. At the moment there is so little space available that it is difficult to spare room for news items of party events. If members criticise the quality of the S.S. articles they should remember that it is a party production and that the responsibility rests with members. The Editorial Committee dealt as patiently as possible with would-be writers, and felt that this could best be done at a writers class. It was not always possible to avoid upsetting writers when dealing with their articles by correspondence.

Resolution - Verity and Spector (Islington) "That this conference strongly recommends the E.C. to change the format of the S.S. from a magazine to a newspaper format"

The Islington delegate said that the appearance of the old S.S. was even better than the present one; the old one looked more like a newspaper. Islington wanted this alteration as soon as possible. In answer to a question a member of the Editorial Committee said that a few months ago it was easier to get newsprint than the paper we use, but to-day it was extremely difficult to get anything. Manchester said they would be sorry to see the present style changed. If we must have change, let us have an S.S. of an even higher intellectual level, rather than a vehicle for entertaining snippets. A fortnightly S.S. composed of news items would not be topical. The S.S. is not a journal published for the entertainment of party members. A non-delegate said that the root of the trouble with the S.S. was that writers were called upon to write a certain type of article. If the scope and type of articles used were widened it would throw open the field to other writers. Other left-wing journals appeared to get newsprint without much difficulty. A member of the Editorial Committee said that they were pleased to get any sort of article providing it was sound. There was no other restriction on writers. There should be more theoretical stuff in the S.S., and writers would not be able to write newsy articles until they had a sound theoretical basis. The present size of the S.S. was decided by the party, and not the Editorial Committee.

The resolution was Lost 8-46.

Resolution (D) - Edgware branch "That this conference views with alarm the lack of current party publications and in view of this instructs the E.C. to proceed with further publications"

A member of the Editorial Committee said that three other pamphlets were in course of preparation, one having already been drafted but not yet presented to the E.C.

The resolution was Cd. 24-17.

Item for discussion (vii) - Manchester branch "That the E.C. and the Editorial Committee explore the possibilities of issuing from time to time the party's attitude to urgent political issues in the form of a bulletin to be sold by the branches at their meetings"

Manchester said that their branch had drawn up a leaflet to be issued at a big meeting to be held in Manchester next week. We should have leaflets on topical issues like the fuel crisis strikes etc., and these leaflets could be given out at big meetings. They should be along the lines of the election briefs.

Resolution - Mertons and J. Dickenson (Manchester) "That this conference urges the E.C. to explore the possibilities of issuing from time to time the party's attitude to urgent political issues in the form of a bulletin or reprints of articles to be sold by branches" Agd.

Item for discussion (x) - Leeds branch "That the party consider discontinuing distribution of pamphlets which contain advertisements relating to other parties, e.g. 'The Communist Manifesto', 'Wage Labour and Capital' and explore the possibility of the S.P.G.B. publishing these pamphlets"

There was no Leeds delegate present to open this discussion. A member of the Editorial Committee said that this question had been considered by the party many years ago and efforts made to deal with it. We had used an edition of the "Communist Manifesto" which did not contain advertisements of other parties but the plates of this edition were now worn out. Other pamphlets had been purchased from the publisher and a party cover pasted over the original ones. This arrangement had now fallen through but efforts would be made to do the same thing again. A party edition of the "Communist Manifesto" with our own preface was in course of preparation. The E.C. were alive to the whole problem.

Resolution - Billing and Craven (Paddington) "That this conference recommends that the first duty of the Editorial Committee, after preparing the Socialist Standard, should be the re-writing of 'War and the Working Class'"

This is a very important pamphlet, said Paddington, and it was withdrawn from sale in 1940 and it should be our first task to get in publication again. A member of the Editorial Committee said that the preliminary work of revision had been started twice, and had been twice abandoned because of other work that had to be done. As previously mentioned three more pamphlets were being prepared on "Race", "Socialism and Religion" and the "Communist Manifesto". Paddington said that the war pamphlet was much more important than the ones referred to. Religion in particular was a trivial matter to most workers. Here the Editorial Committee intervened to point out that they had not at their disposal the number of writers to whom they could farm out stuff that needed writing. A member had to be interested enough in the subject and to have the necessary information and material. The "Communist Manifesto" is very urgent because it is the centenary of its publication.

Resolution - Robertson and Stern (Hackney) "That the vote be taken" Lost 20-25.

Bloomsbury said that the resolution went too far. It meant that the Editorial Committee must drop all work (other than the S.S.). We should not interfere with the work of the committee. A number of members would probably challenge the statement that the war pamphlet was the most important one. An E.C. member said that the resolution was a bad one, because it could not necessarily be put into effect. Were there a bye-election shortly the branch which had tabled the resolution would undoubtedly ask the E.C. to put everything else on one side in order to publish election literature. Southend said that the Editorial Committee were failing because they were undertaking too much work and getting nothing done. War is a problem of major

importance to the working class and we have neglected the presentation of our views on it for too long. A Manchester delegate said that a "Communist Manifesto" would do more to enlighten workers than a pamphlet on war, a subject which the working class knew all too well. Paddington in reply said that they did not ask the Editorial Committee to drop everything they had in hand. It was bad that we had not sold a pamphlet on war for the past seven years.

Resolution Lost 15-36.

Item for discussion (xi) - Paddington branch "That the conference recommends the E.C. to consider ways and means of effectively training a sufficient number of members for editorial work so as to replace positions when necessary and to prepare for any likely extension in that work"

Paddington said that the Editorial Committee could be enlarged, and this would get over some of their difficulties. Among the writers mentioned earlier in the afternoon there must be some who understood the work required of the committee. Why not elect some of them to the committee? A member of the Editorial Committee said that to enlarge the committee would increase the difficulties. The work of the committee consisted mainly of its members separately reading articles submitted, these being sent from one to another by post. Two or three members were necessary on a committee to make sure that the articles submitted are in accordance with the party's position. Each member reads the articles and give their comments on them. They then meet to decide on the articles. Increasing the number of members on the committee would make the process much longer. It would also be difficult to arrange committee meetings with a larger committee at which each member could be present. Years ago it had been agreed that the Editorial Committee should always have in mind members who would be able to be drawn into the work of the committee. At the present time there were four members, apart from members of the committee, who knew of the work of the committee. Training members in Editorial Committee work is part of the scheduled work of the writers class. A non-delegate put forward the suggestion that a member of the Editorial Committee should stand down each year so that a new member who had been trained could take his place. Some members were on the Editorial Committee year after year and eventually they might become stereotyped. A rest now and then would freshen them up. Being on the committee would give new members a sense of responsibility. It would also free present members of the committee for writing pamphlets etc. A Paddington delegate deprecated the discussion of the personnel of committees at the conference. The E.C. appointed its sub-committees and it was a good thing to have experienced members on the Editorial Committee. Leyton said that members should send in to the Editorial Committee any items from their local press which might be handed on to members who wished to write to form a basis for their articles.

Item for discussion (ix) - S.W. London branch "That the party purchase a printing machine"

S.W. London said that they did not wish to pursue this item.

FINANCE

Resolution (E) - S.W. London branch "That this conference instructs the E.C. to make such arrangements as are necessary to merge all the party funds into a common fund for Socialism"

S.W. London said that they thought that we might be faced with the danger of people being prepared to subscribe to our funds for a specific object other than the reasons for which we are in existence. A Tory might contribute to the Parliamentary Fund in order to enable us to put up a candidate to split the vote, and we should then become the tool of another organisation. Some members were apparently prepared to subscribe to one fund rather than another. This led

to a diversion of the party's attention from its prime function, the propagation of socialist ideas. There was also the difficulty of borrowing from one fund to support another and the consequent waste of Executive Committee time in keeping things straight. Let us get back to the old method of having one fund. Bloomsbury opposed the resolution because it inferred that some of our funds were not used for the propagation of socialism. We should not be alarmed if Tories subscribed. S.W. London retorted that we should do without the money of our opponents. Leyton opposed the resolution as they considered subscriptions would fall off if we did not have special funds. The party treasurer felt that we should not hold ourselves hard and fast to keep money inviolate for special purposes. We should not give definite undertakings that money will be used exclusively for one particular purpose. Paddington saw the resolution a method by which opponents of a particular form of party activity would use the question of funds as a part of their opposition. An E.C. member said that the inference of S.W. London's opening remarks was that those who subscribe to the party can influence its policy. This was incorrect. The party first decides on a policy and then asks for subscriptions. Ealing said that the party many years ago said that it would take money from anyone provided it was given unconditionally. An E.C. member referred to the attempt made many years ago by the Anti-Socialist Union to purchase large numbers of a particular issue of the Socialist Standard which they thought would help their propaganda. The order had been refused by the E.C. In closing the discussion S.W. London said that they were not opposed to electoral action, but thought it premature at the moment. They also did not think that party money was being used for any other purpose than the furtherance of the party's object. They were, however, very anxious to keep the party from the slippery slope of political trading, and they did not wish to see money tied up for special purposes when it was needed for the general work of the party.

Resolution Lost 5-58.

PARTIES ABROAD

In reply to a question the Overseas Secretary said that no more news had been received from the French comrade who had been present at the last conference. The Overseas Secretary gave more details of our companion parties. The Socialist Party of Australia had a membership of 40 with locals at Melbourne and Sydney. They had about 15 active members, the remainder being spread over the continent. They were trying to keep their journal in existence. They had originally published 3000, this was then dropped to 1000 and they feared that they would have to cease publication shortly through lack of finances. The Socialist Party of Canada had three locals, one each at Vancouver (very weak), Victoria and Winnipeg. They were trying to form a local at Montreal. The Socialist Party of New Zealand had a membership of 25. There had recently been some divergence of opinion over a question of party rule. The matter did not appear to be very serious. The Workers Socialist Party of U.S.A. had 52 members. They had a number of sympathisers spread over the U.S.A. who helped them financially. They have a large permanent head office in Boston. Their finances are healthy and they are very active. They have a paid organiser and a paid secretary. The organiser travels extensively and a local is being formed in Detroit, and there are possibilities of locals in other cities. Their meetings are regular and well attended.

Item for discussion (xii) - Islington branch "The desirability of setting up an international contact committee"

Islington opened by saying that on the continent of Europe there was not one group accepting our position. At the last conference a comrade had said that he was in contact with various groups abroad who were sympathetic to us. The party is not doing enough.

We have not a single publication in a foreign language. Europe has a number of organisations looking at things from the point of view of the working class. They may not be socialists, but they have working class support. The Left Communists in France oppose the system in Russia, although they do not accept our position on Parliament, but they define socialism in the same way as we do. There was a similar group in Italy. When there was a printers strike in France recently, the printers would only print the Anarchist and Trotskyist papers. We should have a contact committee to put our case to organisations on the continent, so that with the development of events our position may be known abroad. A Marylebone delegate said that in a recent broadcast the burgomaster of Heidelberg had put a view very similar to ours when dealing with the present situation in Germany. In answer to a question the Overseas Secretary said that no attempt had been made to get the Socialist Standard into the reading rooms in the area of the Allied Control Commission in Germany. Edgware felt that the work could be carried out by the Overseas Secretary who could find members to help him.

Resolution - Spector and Verity (Islington) "That this conference urges the E.C. to set up an international contact committee to make the party's case known on the continent"

Islington carried on the discussion by saying that there were a number of members who could speak French, and Italian. There is to be an international socialist conference at Zurich at which the reformist parties were to meet. Why not send a party representative to put the party's view? There were a number of factions in the continental parties who might be very interested in our case. We should also get a lot of publicity. A past Overseas Secretary said that if the idea was to get hold of groups abroad who it was claimed were near to our point of view, why not do the same with similar groups in this country. All of these groups are opposed to the socialist position. They are anti-parliamentarian and Islington knew it. Why waste time attending the conferences of organisations who are entirely opposed to us? There is no short cut by which we can get a group abroad to accept our principles. Until we have individuals abroad who know our case it will be a difficult task. Marylebone again took part in the debate and said that the time had never before been so propitious for taking action along the lines of the resolution. To-day on the continent there are a number of individuals whose minds have been thrown open to the message of socialism. No single person could do the detailed work involved, and machinery must be created to assist him. S.W. London said that sympathisers on the continent had as much chance of getting in touch with us as we with them. When we have saturated the minds of the working people of this country it will be time to extend our activities to the continent. A Bloomsbury delegate, expressing a personal view, said that the sentiments of the resolution should be endorsed. Some members wanted the workers here and abroad to do all the work of finding out about socialism, with the party doing nothing. There must be a number of workers abroad who disagree with the position taken up by the Social Democrats and Communists, and they are probably on the way to our point of view, or at any rate in an open frame of mind. Members of the committee must have a knowledge of the countries of Europe, and also of the languages. Islington said that S.W. London's view of saturating the minds of the workers here first seen to imagine a situation in which the British workers would be socialists, with few abroad. Newport supported the resolution, the time being always opportune for spreading our message whether in this country or abroad. Socialism, said a Paddington delegate, implied co-operation and this did not mean that others should do all the work of coming to us. Neither did it mean that all the work must be done by us. Where capitalism exists it is fair to presume that there will be socialists. Another members who had once been Overseas

Secretary said that it would be wise to recognise the kind of thing that is possible and useful. A committee of this kind should assist the Overseas Secretary in his work. We must aim at making contacts with individuals abroad who could do socialist propaganda in the districts in which they lived, and not with the officials of organisations. We must have men in the continental countries who know our position and can put it to individuals in the groups abroad. We ought to collect at Head Office the Declaration of Principles and policies of continental parties, so that we shall know where they stand. We had contacts with groups abroad before the war who knew our position, and the more they knew it the less they liked it. We ought to remember the organisations with which such groups sought contacts here - not with us, but with the I.L.P., anarchists etc. Some of them put what appeared to be a sound theoretical position, but when they engage in practical politics they completely diverge from our point of view. Before the war we had an old member who travelled widely on the continent pushing the party's case, and he did more than the party can ever hope to do. The present political tendency in Europe among workers was against Stalinism and towards Labour reformism. The present Overseas Secretary said that we had had contacts abroad for some years with individuals and organisations. Recently we had sent letters to 43 individuals in various parts of the world and so far only one reply had been received. His attitude was to sow as much seed as possible in the hope that it might bring some return. A member was translating a party leaflet into German, and it was hoped to translate it also into French. The Overseas Secretary could do all the work required at the moment; later it might be necessary to farm some of the work out. Hardly any members had given the Overseas Sec. names and addresses of contacts abroad. He would like to get hold of members able to write in foreign languages. Islington replied that they were not concerned with fusion conferences, but they wanted the party's views put over under the best possible conditions. Individuals abroad who were disgruntled with their organisations did not know our case, and would not know it unless we took it to them.

Resolution Cd. 30-18.

Item for discussion (xv) - Manchester branch "Should members of the party pay the political levy?"

The General Secretary advised the conference of the following resolution of the 34th E.C.... "That it is not permissible for a member to participate in payment of the political fund of trade unions until such times as these funds are allocated to the S.P.G.B." This ruling had subsequently been confirmed by party poll.

Resolution - McLaughlin (S.W.London) and Lees (Manchester) "That this conference re-affirms the party's previous decision on the payment of the political levy as given above" Cd 53-1.

Item for discussion (xiv) - Manchester branch "The party's attitude to the closed shop"

There was a lengthy discussion on this question which covered the same field as that at the party meeting of 6th October 1946.

Resolution - G. Wood and W. Rose (Lewisham) "That this conference endorses the view in the following resolution carried at the party meeting on 6th October 1946: 'That this party meeting is of the opinion that on balance compulsory trade union membership is not in the best interest of the trade union movement and the working class in the struggle against the employing class'" Cd. 49-4.

MISCELLANEOUS

1946 Conference resolution on the task confronting the party

Resolution - Lockwood and McLaughlin (S.W.London) "That this conference accepts the E.C.'s report as being an adequate guide to the task confronting the party in the future"

S.W. London in opening said that they did not agree that there were some quick and easy ways of developing the party, and the summary of the E.C.'s views was adequate. Edgware said that we must get the party's name much more widely known, and they wanted some concrete suggestions from the E.C. It was erroneous to say that the party was making good progress. They suggested a series of meetings in large halls in the provinces with adequate publicity. There should be a national advertising campaign. We must have a full-time member of the Editorial Committee and a paid assistant at Head Office. Central branch members should be brought together at regular intervals. Members should persuade sympathisers to get into the ranks of the party. Layton said that the organisation does not grow from the outside but grows from within. The quality of the membership is the important thing, and it is not what it ought to be. An E.C. member repudiated this statement, and said that, speaking from his long experience of the party the quality of our membership is now higher than it has been in the past. We need not be ashamed of ourselves as socialists. A non-delegate said that it might be useful for delegates to exchange experiences and find out why we did not retain a large number of workers who come into the party. We must find ways and means of keeping members in the party. Branch meetings should be made brighter and propaganda made more attractive. There should be lively controversial discussions at branch meetings. The General Secretary said that a wrong impression had been created by the last speaker, about the number of members leaving the party. Since the formation of the party in 1904 we had had about 5030 members on the books, and the membership to-day was about 930. It should also be remembered that a considerable number out of the 5030 were members who had left and rejoined, in many cases more than once.

Resolution Cd. 39-4.

TRADE UNIONS (CONT.)

Resolution - McLaughlin and Taylor (S.W. London) "That this conference re-affirms the party's attitude towards the trade unions, i.e. that we support trade union action when it is in line with working class interest" Cd. unam.

PROPAGANDA (CONT.)

Resolution (A) - Bradford and District branch "That this conference is of the opinion that provincial propaganda can best be conducted from Manchester and that a committee, representative of the North of England branches should be set up there, which together with the propaganda committee in London will arrange and direct the activities of a provincial propagandist/organiser resident in Manchester"

Eccles said that within 30 miles of Manchester there was a population greater than that of London, most of whom had no opportunity of hearing the socialist message. Speakers came to Manchester but they had no help at Eccles. There should be a direction of Manchester and North of England propaganda from Manchester. Glasgow said that there was no satisfactory evidence that provincial propaganda could best be conducted from Manchester.

The resolution was lost 16-40.

Resolution (B) - Bradford and District branch "That arrangements be made for the speakers test to be undertaken in Manchester if this is more convenient to the member concerned"

The General Secretary said that the E.C. were always willing to do their best to arrange for tests to be taken outside London if applicants could not travel to London.

Resolution Cd. 39-21.

FINANCE (CONT.)

Resolution - J. D'Arcy and J. Moore (Bloomsbury) "That this conference recommends the E.C. to investigate the suggestion of raising membership contributions and report to the next conference" Cd.38-7.

LITERATURE (CONT.)

Item for discussion (viii) - Hackney branch "Shall the book 'Money must go' be placed on the approved literature list"

Hackney said that this was a book of value to propaganda. It gives general answers to general questions without mentioning the word Socialism. It emphasises the necessity of abolishing money under Socialism, and the question of money is a great barrier to an understanding of our case.

Resolution - McLaughlin and Lockwood (S.W.London) "That in the opinion of this conference this matter should be left to the discretion of the E.C."

The General Secretary pointed out that Hackney had already made a request to the E.C. that the book should be approved, and the E.C. had refused their request. This conference was the only method left to Hackney to raise the question.

Resolution was lost 18-25.

A member of the Editorial Committee said the decision on this book was not an easy one. Opinions differed as to its value. Among objections to it was that it did not mention socialism or the S.P.G.B. The book did not sufficiently urge the necessity for political organisation. The general impression given was that the cause of working class problems was the money system. An Islington delegate said that the book was on the official literature lists of the companion parties. He thought the book could do more good than harm. A Paddington delegate said that the book dealt with other theories which we might find it difficult to defend.

Resolution - Spector and Clark (Islington) "That this conference urges the E.C. to place upon the approved literature list the book 'Money must go'" Lost 9-36.

Conference terminated at 6 p.m. on Sunday 6th April 1947

DELEGATION

1st day - 58 delegates representing 23 branches

2nd day - 64 2 2 22 2

3rd day - 57 " " 22 "

Leeds and Dagenham were not represented

Collections amounting to £19 were taken during the proceedings

Rugby Chambers, W.C.1

C. C. GROVES
General Secretary.